

Aging Committee

Public Hearing on Proposed S.B. No. 79

AN ACT REQUIRING ELECTRICAL POWER GENERATORS AT STATE-ASSISTED
SENIOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS.

February 5, 2013

Testimony of Cathy K. Forcier

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Housing Committee: My name is Cathy Forcier and I am a Senior Vice President of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Housing & Redevelopment Officials more commonly known as CONN-NAHRO. I am also the Executive Director of the Wethersfield Housing Authority. I have worked in public housing since 1987.

I have mixed feelings regarding S.B. 79 – An Act Requiring Electrical Power Generators at State-Assisted Senior Housing Developments.

Wethersfield has been affected by power outages caused by the October snowstorms in 2011 and 2012 as well as the tornado in 2009. There were two extended power outages with these events.

The Housing Authority developed a detailed Emergency Operations Plan. Meetings with the town officials were held. The town made a shelter available to all Wethersfield residents, when needed, including those residents living in the 3 elderly and 2 family housing developments owned by the Housing Authority. Transportation was available to those residents who needed it to get to the shelter.

The Housing Authority staff was trained and equipped to handle the events in terms of the physical damage and in assisting residents. Information was issued to residents regarding what to expect and how to prepare for storms.

Prior to a storm housing authority staff contacted each elderly/disabled resident to encourage relocation with family/friends or preparation to go to the shelter where their needs would be met. Some residents chose to go elsewhere but most decided to stay in their homes. Staff made sure residents had food, water, medication and flashlights.

After the storms staff contacted all remaining residents to see what their needs were and to make sure all who wanted to go to the shelter at that time were able to get there. The housing authority has one generator for the administration building, including a community room. Residents came in during the day to get warm and socialize with others. The Housing Authority provided coffee, water and snacks. The Housing Authority charged cell phones so residents could keep in contact with family and friends.

Grills were set up outside. Residents, as a community, cooked their thawing food and shared with their neighbors.

Installing generators sounds like a wonderful idea. It would have made my personal life easier if I had one at my disposal at home during these extended power outages. Both cost and safety concern me.

My housing authority does not have the funds to provide more than it does currently. We have state housing only and have no operating subsidy to rely on. Seventy of our 112 elderly/disabled residents are of such low income that they rely upon the State of CT ERAP program to pay base rents ranging from only \$234 to \$326 per month. They can't afford an increase in rents to pay for the purchase of generators, their maintenance, the fuel to run them or the manpower to oversee their usage. The State of CT can't afford the increased costs to the ERAP program if the rents increase.

If generators are permanently installed this would reduce safety concerns but would increase the cost. If not permanently installed then cords will run from each generator to whatever devices are being powered. This is a safety concern. There are also safety concerns regarding the fuel.

This Housing Authority has estimated the cost to provide generators to every elderly unit to be in excess of \$1,000,000. This does not include fuel or maintenance or staff time. It would also not include the cost to secure the system.

I fully support this legislation if the State of Connecticut is prepared to cover both the initial and ongoing expenses to provide a safe system.

I oppose this legislation if the State of Connecticut is not prepared to fund it.

Respectfully submitted,

Cathy K. Forcier